Nihil Sub Sole Novi

Harry Worcester Smith
Lordvale, North Grafton
Massachusetts, U.S.A.

1. A. L. S. of Rudolph Ackermann to Wm Jerdan, Oct. 22, 1826.
2. Pages 77-78 from New Sporting Magazine on Rudolph Ackermann.
3. The Connoisseur Sept. or Oct. 1928 with article "Ackermann and his Colour Prints" by E. Beresford Chancellor.

HARRY WORCESTER SMITH

RUDOLPH ACKERMANN

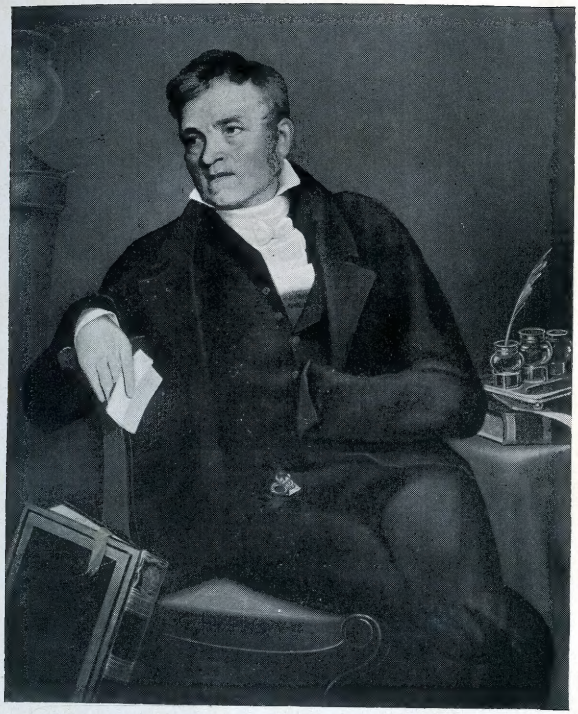
HIS LIFE

THE POPULARISER OF AQUATINT ENGRAVING

PIONEER OF ART—
BOOK ILLUSTRATION

1, East 45th Street, New York.

"He attempted nothing that he did not embellish."



From the painting by Mouchet.

RUDOLPH ACKERMANN

Born 1764. **Died 1834.**

64

From an Old and Rare Print dated 1786.

Ackermann's Repository of Arts and British Forum for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

MUCH has been written at different times of Rudolph Ackermann, who in the early part of last century did so much towards the modernising and beautifying of Book-illustration, and the popularising of print production. There are indeed, few important libraries, either public, or of the private collector in London or in New York, that have not at least one example of the charming and now so rare books, which were produced under his guidance, and so delightfully enhanced with the brilliant aquatint engraved plates, which are so well-known, and so greatly sought after.

The following lines form as near as possible in limited space an epitome of facts narrated elsewhere, which may prove of interest to the lovers of the antique, and collectors of such engravings as represent anecdotes in the lives and habits of those who have gone before us; their works and their pleasures; the parts they played on the sands of life, and the seeds they sowed, the fruits of which we have reaped.

Rudolph Ackermann was born in 1764 at Stolberg, in Saxony, and was the third son of one Rudolph, a descendant of a long line of yeomen landowners in Prussia. At the age of fifteen the desire for travel came upon him, and in 1779, we hear of his coming to London, England, where he found considerably greater facilities for following the artistic pursuits, which even during his childhood showed distinct prominence. His chief affection then was in the designing of Carriages, of which there are still many beautifully executed designs carefully preserved in the various Museums. Amongst his achieve-

ments in this direction, was the designing of Lord Nelson's funeral car, which is now preserved in the vaults of St. Paul's Cathedral; previous to this, he designed the State Coach, built at a cost £7,000, for the Lord Lieut. of Ireland in 1790, and another for the Lord Mayor of Dublin in 1805. And there were numbers of great improvements of his invention for both comfort and utility that are in use right up to the present day.

After a few years he conceived the idea of securing a means of faithful reproduction of original paintings, and of water-colour drawings, the style of which at the commencement of the last century is so well known, and after expending much time in careful study with certain young engravers whose fame was then in embryo, he produced by means of the process of engraving then practically unknown—"Aquatint"—two or three engraved copper plates of London scenes, which were received everywhere with astonishment and delight. But Rudolph Ackermann did not claim this beautiful process as his own. It is believed that the actual inventor or

discoverer, was one—"Jean Baptiste Le Prince"—a native of Metz in Germany, who shortly before his death in 1781, it is known, conversed freely with Ackermann on matters of engraving.

It may not be out of place to mention briefly the working in its early stages of this powerful art, now practically dead.

A highly polished copper plate was taken and inserted into an air-tight box or chamber, in which a small fly-wheel at the top of the box, laden with a quantity of powdered resin, had previously been set in motion, thus raising a miniature cloud of resin dust. The plate was never inserted until the heavier particles had settled, and thus the plate was shortly covered with an exceedingly fine coat of resin dust. This was afterwards subjected to very gentle heat, just sufficient to cause the tiny particles to adhere to the copper. It can of course be clearly seen that these granules being naturally round, would leave minute spaces through which the acid afterwards used to bite into the plate,

One of a pair of exquisite Figures in Biscuit China,
presented to Rudolph Ackermann by the grateful citizens of Stolberg,
after terrible privations following the Battle of Leipzic, 1811.

"..... The finer the eye for colour, the less it will require to gratify itself intensely; but that little must be supremely good and pure, as the finest notes of a great singer which are so near silence. And a great colourist will make even the absence of colour lovely, as the fading of the perfect voice makes silence sacred....."

(Ruskin)

could attack the copper thus forming the beautiful "ground" always seen on aquatint plates.

The working however, was not found to be really practicable, and shortly afterwards (but after the death of Le Prince) what became known as the "fluid ground" was discovered. This consisted of resin as before, but dissolved in pure alcohol, and to which a small quantity of water had been added and the plate after being flooded with this compound was allowed to harden. Naturally the presence of water would cause a certain degree of contraction on evaporation, thus rendering the plate's surface a series of tiny cracks, which if anything, were of greater use to the engraver than the early "dust" ground. The plate was then ready to receive fine touches of acid by the master hand of the engraver, who, according to the amount of light, shade, and tone required, would stop out a part here, and "bite in" there, and in the end, a plate of extreme beauty, full of brilliance, and rich in good, true tone, was produced.

These plates delighted the public, and from that period commenced a career which has caused Ackermann's name to be known throughout the world. He took premises with a large laboratory in the Strand, London, Eng., and ere long, obtained the services of such engravers as Rowlandson, Bartolozzi, Sutherland, Mackenzie, with whose help he produced many hundreds of exquisite engravings, both for book illustration, and for wall decoration. The windows of his store became one of the sights of London, and his Gallery the rendezvous of fashionable society. Rowlandson, the world-renowned caricaturist was always a familiar figure there, for Ackermann was his publisher, and many were the members of the Peerage who loved to chat with this famous humorist, whose name is as familiar to westerners, as in the city of his birth. Pugin, the world-famous architect, was closely associated with this great and energetic publisher, as the large numbers of engravings of his works show.

In the year 1814, Ackermann produced a fine work in two volumes, and illustrated

From an original print by Bartolozzi.

"The Darling Awake."

(By Adam Buck).

"……By the purchase of every print which hangs on your walls, of every cup out of which you drink, and every table off which you eat your bread, you are educating a mass of men in one way or another ……you are leading them to look at nature, and to love her……to think, to feel, and to enjoy……"

(Ruskin)

to a degree of magnificence hitherto unknown (and not even attempted in these present days) of the Universities, Colleges, and Public Schools of England. The plates forming the illustrations were superb specimens of the Aquatinter's art, and were beautifully coloured by hand in water-colour by capable artists with whom Ackermann was so closely in touch. This, and many other works were well subscribed for, and the copper plates were shortly afterwards destroyed, as having fulfilled their mission, hence the extreme rarity of these beautiful works.

Amongst the books Ackermann published, were:—

History of Westminster Abbey.
The Microcosm of London.
The Rivers Seine and Rhine.
The West Indies.
History of India.
Mexico.
The Country Homes and Houses of England.
The River Thames.
The London Volunteers of 1798,

and many other choice works, all of the

same distinctiveness that so characterised the whole of his life. These are only a few of the items which now form the finest pictorial records of the world's history. Then there was the sporting side of our existence, which he immortalised. He produced many charming books illustrated in the same way, as for instance:

Mr. Jorrocks.
The Life of a Sportsman.
Jack Mytton.
And others.

He then turned his attention to the pleasure side of print production. With the assistance of the now well-known although long since deceased artists, such as Henry Alken, J. Pollard, Wolstenholme, &c., he placed upon the market charming prints in colour of old English Country Sports.

Indeed, it is due to Ackermann's efforts that we have to-day (although it is now extremely difficult to obtain the genuine old prints) those delightful old Fox-Hunting scenes, depicting the "bloods" of the various Counties at their respective Meets,

"O'er rough, o'er smooth, nor heeds the steepy hill,
Nor falters in the extended vale below;
Their garments loosely waving in the wind
And all the flush of beauty in their cheeks."

In "Handley Cross; or, Mr. Jorrocks's Hunt," First Edition, 1854,—

Mr. Jorrocks delivers a Lecture on Hunting (see p. 130), in which occurs the passage :—

"'Unting is the sport of Kings, the image of war without its guilt, and only five-and-twenty per cent. of its danger!"

".....It is in that golden stain of time that we are to look for the real light, and colour, and preciousness....."

(Ruskin)

with the square ivy-clad village church tower in the background surrounded by peaceful English elms, the scurry across open country to the music of the pack, the "pinks" of the field scattered over the peaceful country, so peculiar to older England—Reynard in sight, and lastly the kill, in either the open or in covert. Or similar pictures of the old beaver-hatted squire toppling down with his muzzle-loader a fat pheasant, bustled out of the hedge-rows by spaniels, or on the stubble in early morn with the partridges.

These were the typical engravings which naturally met with a ready sale at a nominal price, and which have for the last seventy or eighty years graced the walls of the English Country Homes, where many of them may still be seen, never failing to give pleasure to the eye, and an added charm to their surroundings, as they rest in their old and often worm-eaten frames, which often give evidence of the wood-carver's skill. With them are possibly prints of their late owner's other recreations which, perhaps, was Hawking, Badger-baiting,

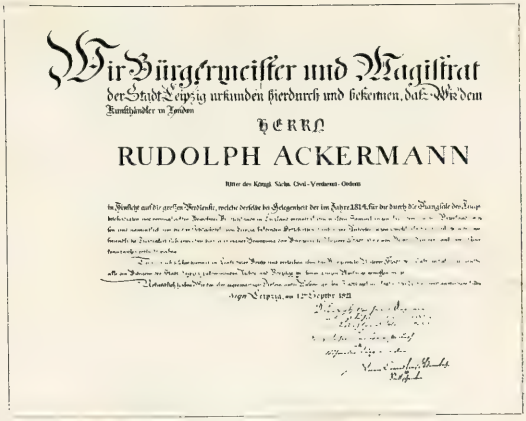
Cock-fighting, or other pastimes, some of which are no longer in existence.

It is difficult to conceive a better means now of decorating one's Country House, especially if one is a lover of Sport, than with the delightful old scenes of our Ancestors' pastimes and pleasures. The pictures are uncommon, beautifully mellowed by the hand of time, and do much to carry one out of the bustle of modern times.

Ackermann was always early in the field of applied Science. His was the first commercial house in England, and for that matter, the whole world, to be lighted by coal gas, then only in quite experimental stages, with a private gas producing plant he had partly constructed himself. Rowlandson relates the anecdote in the shape of a curious and excessively rare print dated December 23rd, 1809, and entitled: "A Peep at the Gas Lights in the Strand."

And we are told that crowds of curious and astonished people flocked to the scene, then so unique, keeping a very respectful

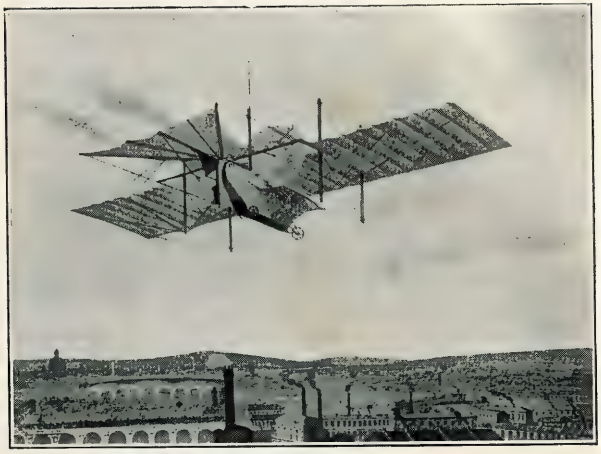
A Costly China Vase,
the gift of His Majesty the King of Saxony, 1820.



Wir Bürgermeister und Magistrat
der Stadt Leipzig urkunden hierdurch und bekennen, daß Wir dem
Kunsthändler in London
HERRN
RUDOLPH ACKERMANN
Ritter des Königl. Sächs. Civil-Verdienst-Ordens

Leipzig, am 12ten September 1821.

A Warrant dated 1821, conferring the Freedom of the City of Leipzic upon Rudolph Ackermann.



From a rare print published by R. Ackermann.

distance from the place, and expecting to see the whole building blown into the air; but on this, the first occasion, they were disappointed.

In these modern days we are also indebted to Rudolph Ackermann for the production of four superb engravings in colour, of the first motor omnibus and airships dated 1824 and 1833, copies of which are in the Museums, and duplicates are occasionally met with.

It seems to follow as a matter of course that this remarkable man who interested himself—and in no dabbling way—with so many different subjects, should possess the kindest of hearts. Kind and courteous to all; he did not forget in these days of prosperity the sufferings of the poor around him, that the budding young artist, with only talent to help him, must receive pecuniary assistance; and when the news reached him periodically of the devastations wrought in the train of Napoleon's marches, he set himself with almost frantic energy, to alleviate the

sufferings of those thousands—particularly in Saxony—who had been rendered homeless, friendless, and penniless.

He subscribed large sums himself, and set in motion a Relief Fund, in which he succeeded in raising £100,000, and to which he obtained the grant of the English Government of another £100,000.

After the Battle of Leipzic, one of the most sanguinary conflicts in the Peninsular War, this money was distributed—thanks being showered upon Ackermann from all quarters. There were many costly presents (some of which are roughly illustrated in this little work) afterwards sent him as mementoes of his charitable acts.

In 1834, after a life of true energy, he received a slight stroke of paralysis, and was removed from London to Finchley. He appeared to rally, only to have a relapse, and on March 30th he passed peacefully away. He was buried in the Church of St. Clement Danes, in the Strand.

One of a pair of exquisite Figures in Biscuit China, presented to Rudolph Ackermann by the grateful citizens of Stolberg, after terrible privations following the Battle of Leipzic. 1811.

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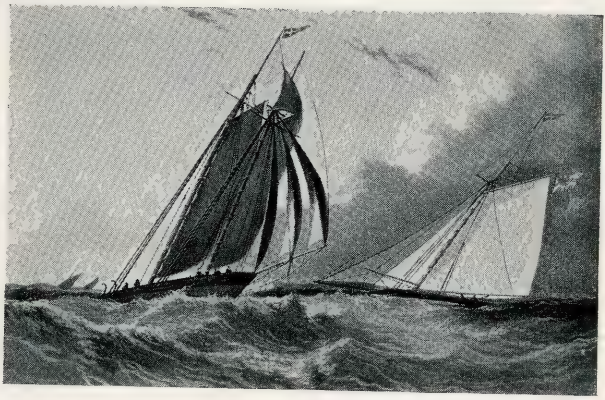
New York.

"Earl Sefton came next, and for beef on the rib,
No Leicestershire bullock was rounder;
A wonderful weight, at a wonderful rate,
He flew like a twenty-four pounder!"



"He that has sail'd upon the dark blue sea
Has view'd at times, I ween, a full fair sight;
When the fresh breeze is fair as breeze may be,
The white sail set, the gallant frigate tight."

(Byron)

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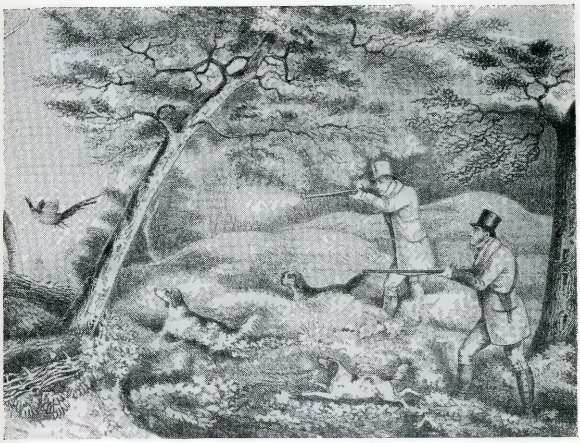
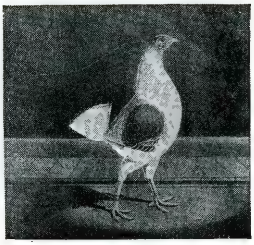


"A hound and a hawk no longer
Shall be symptoms of disaffection;
A cock-fight shall cease to be breach of the peace
And a horse-race an insurrection."

(Song of the Cavaliers)



Greihounds he hadde as swift, as fond of flight
Of pricking and of hunting for the hare
Was all his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.

(Canterbury Tales)

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A very early equivalent, of similar sound and purpose to the Tally ho! with which a huntsman now cheers on his hounds, appears in a quaint old song printed in 1730, called "The Death of Reynard, the Fox," by Sir William Younge:

He quickly found the cover
Too hot for him to stay,
And soon Ned Callet spied him
Stealing across the way.
"Tolle aux!" then Callet cried,
And gave a gibbet shrill.
He tossed his brush as who should say,
"Come, kiss me if you will!"

Some, however, derive the cry when a fox breaks cover from "Taillis hors," the French for "out of the coppice."

"For a sorrow's crown of sorrows,
In remembering happier things."

(Tennyson)

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